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# Royal Academy of Music Magazine

Incorporating the Official Record of The RAM Club

Number 250 Spring 1992  
Royal Academy of Music  
Marylebone Road  
London NW1 5HT

By the time this edition of the *Royal Academy of Music Magazine* is published, chances are that Election Day will have taken place. Whatever the outcome, it's unlikely that the brouhaha surrounding the music National Curriculum, at least that proposed for England, is going to die down until certain fundamental issues have been resolved.

Anybody who is unaware of the fuss has probably been on sabbatical to New Guinea, such has been the reaction of the music profession to Education Secretary Kenneth Clarke's decision to heed the National Curriculum Council's advice to 'simplify' the recommendations of the minister's own music working group. Simon Rattle led the charge with a much-reported attack on the changes. "If the Secretary of State accepts the NCC document", he said, "it would be the greatest disaster for music in Britain in my lifetime". Rattle's sentiments have been echoed loudly by other prominent musicians and educationalists, Pierre Boulez, Sir Colin Davis, Sir Charles Groves, Richard Hickox, Gillian Moore and James MacMillan among them.

Debate has concentrated on the emphasis placed by the NCC on pupils being able "to understand the contribution made to the development of music by a range of influential composers". The examples of composers provided, including Monteverdi, Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, Elgar and Tippett, stress the importance of the western classical tradition at the expense of other musics, in contradiction to the more flexible approach favoured by the music working group. Tippett himself has condemned the narrowness of such a Eurocentric curriculum. Examples of music from other cultures, suggested by the working group, have in the main been dropped from the NCC's programmes of study.

The NCC's decision to bracket performing with composing has also been criticised. Given the prescriptive details outlined by the NCC for attainment targets in the knowledge and understanding of music, fears were voiced that insufficient classroom time would be devoted to creative music making. Children at the age of 11 would have to demonstrate the "distinctive characteristics" of music from medieval times to the present day, "recognising the way in which musical traditions have been established".

There are those who argue that traditional studies, such as harmony, theory and history of music should be preserved at all costs. They see the non-prescriptive programmes of study suggested by the music working group as another example of the erosion of 'academic' music, a trend set in motion by the flexible GCSE curriculum, which has made a wide range of musical activities possible for examination purposes but which allows jazz and rock to enter the syllabus as 'legitimate' musical genres. The point seems to have been missed. Of course, learning to harmonize a Bach Chorale or analysing a fugue provide useful measures by which to judge a student's abilities; the historical context of music, likewise, is important. But so too is developing the creative processes required to compose an advertising jingle, harmonise a well-known tune in a popular style or to handle electronic instruments.

If such a hypothesis seems simplistic, then there is ample evidence elsewhere in this magazine for the benefits of versatility. David Palmer makes no excuses for his own career: he doesn't need to. His success as a performer and composer is not limited to any one musical field, and his ability to crossover from one musical style to another would seem far more familiar to a member of the Bach family than the narrow requirements of the proposed music National Curriculum.

ANDREW STEWART

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Editor: Andrew Stewart 081-556 4670 (tel/fax)

Advertising Sales: Rachel Wheatley 071-372 0780

Printed by Stott Brothers, Halifax

Editorial contributions and enquiries should be addressed to: The Editor, *Royal Academy of Music Magazine*, Royal Academy of Music, Marylebone Road, London NW1 5HT. © The Royal Academy of Music 1992. *Royal Academy of Music Magazine* welcomes letters and articles for publication but reserves the right to edit, alter, abridge or reject any material.

Cover illustration: David Palmer.



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## News Update

### People & Places

**Congratulations** to Elisabeth Schwarzkopf HonRAM, who was awarded a DBE in the New Year's Honours. Andrew Davis HonRAM received the CBE in the same honours' list.



*Dame Elisabeth Schwarzkopf.*

**Novello's Hire Library**, one of the largest and most comprehensive of its kind, has moved to the company's offices in Sevenoaks, Kent. From Beethoven to Bennett, Mahler to Milhaud or Puccini to Penderecki, Novello's extensive hire catalogues offer most works from the standard repertoire and many more besides. Tim Rogers, Novello's marketing manager, told the *RAM Magazine* that "there will be significant advantages to Novello operations by having just one distribution centre for hire and sales products, and this will allow the company to remain competitive well into the 1990s." Prospective customers should now address their enquiries to the Hire Library, Novello & Co Ltd, Block 7, Vestry Estate, Sevenoaks, Kent TN14 5EL tel: 0732 464999 fax: 0732 459779.

**The Manchester International Cello Festival** goes from strength to strength, this year

extended to four days of concerts and related events (30 April-3 May). The festival aims to offer young cellists the chance to meet and work with top players and teachers, including Ralph Kirshbaum, Anner Bylma, Julian Lloyd Webber, Mischa Maisky, Moray Welsh and Gregor Horsch. Student delegates wishing to attend the entire festival should contact Jenny Langridge, strings representative of the Royal Northern College of Music Students Union. Programme and ticket details can be obtained from the Box Office, RNCM, 124 Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9RD tel: 061-273 4504

**A new scheme for Corporate Membership** of the Academy has recently been established. The first Corporate Members are NCR Ltd, Yamaha (UK) Ltd, 3i Group plc, and the Princess Grace Hospital. All are supporters of the Academy, both financially and strategically, and some are near neighbours. The Academy wishes to extend its gratitude to Corporate Members for the interest they take in Academy events and objectives.

Following on from its immensely successful tour to Korea last April, the Academy Sinfonia will be out and about once more, performing at Castle Howard on 15 May and

the Salle Gaveau in Paris on 21 May. Both concerts have been made possible by generous support from the 3i Group plc, whose three-year sponsorship of the Sinfonia began last October. While in Paris the Sinfonia will also give a lunchtime concert at the Paris Conservatoire on 22 May. The tour is intended to continue the work of raising the Academy's national and international profile. An Academy chamber music ensemble is also about to embark on a short visit to Korea and Taiwan to enhance our recruitment strategies in the Far East.

**The London International Orchestral Season**, promoted by a consortium of leading concert agencies, kicks off at the Royal Festival Hall on 10 April with a performance of Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* and Mozart's Piano Concerto No.17 given by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under its new music director Daniel Barenboim. Academy string players who remember the London debut of Armenian violinist Nikolai Madoyan in the Duke's Hall a few seasons back can catch up with him again, playing the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with the Novosibirsk Philharmonic and Arnold Katz (12 May). The Philadelphia Orchestra and Riccardo Muti play Scriabin's Second Symphony and Elgar's *In the South* (25 May) and Lorin Maazel

### Artscard A Big Success

Some 150 people now hold the Midland Bank Artscard. Every time they use it a small proportion of the purchase price is credited to the Academy as their nominated beneficiary. The Academy would like to thank all those who are helping in this way. Approximately £1,000 has so far been raised and it has been decided that all Artscard receipts will be put towards the cost of the masterclasses which form so significant a part of the annual curriculum.

A glance at the recent January - April *Diary of Events* shows how varied and how distinguished were the international artists who visited the Academy to give masterclasses. This policy of encouraging world-class performers to give Academy students an insight into their experiences and techniques is one that will be fostered - and Artscard holders can feel that their contributions are genuinely enriching the international profile of the institution.

Long may this continue, and may many more interested people take up the chance to use Artscard to benefit the Academy in this exciting, fundamental way.



brings the Pittsburgh Symphony to London to perform Mozart and Mahler (8 June). The Berlin Radio Symphony and Montreal Symphony orchestras bring their own distinctive sounds to this annual series (28 May, 20 June), which promises to bring the world's finest orchestras to London. Further details from the LIOS Box Office, Royal Festival Hall, London SE1 8XX tel: 071-928 8800.

### Competitions and Scholarships

**With the Society for the Promotion of New Music** and Sonic Arts Network currently expanding its work in regional centres, composers of any age wishing for wider recognition should consider submitting new works for consideration by the SPNM/Sonic Arts Network reading panel for possible performance in concerts and workshops in 1993. Deadline for submissions is 31 July and further details can be obtained direct from the SPNM, 1-14 West Heath Yard, 174 Mill Lane, London NW6 1TB.

**T**enors with millionaire poten-

## Mingled Chimes

*Colin Shepping paints a memorable picture of music sales in Marylebone.*

**Chimes Music Shop** has been in existence since the 1940s. The shop was originally located at 65 Marylebone High Street and the first owner was Anne Knight. She ran the shop on the basis of a social club and, apparently, not as a profit-making concern. There was a dining table and chairs in the centre of the shop, intended for the sole use of a group of elderly ladies who met for tea, to play dominoes and gossip. The interior of the shop was very gloomy, dark brown being the predominant colour.

On reaching retirement age and faced with poor trade, Mrs Knight decided to sell the shop to Anthony Shepping and myself, his father. Lack of space at No. 65 made it necessary to move across the street to new premises at No. 44, where the amenities are much more congenial. The business has now expanded greatly and our stock is vast. We also offer various services, such as flute and general wind repairs, and hire and sell instruments. Mail order has become a major part of the business, with music and accessories posted to destinations throughout the world.

Although you're still welcome to come a gossip, we no longer have facilities for domino sessions, but we do offer a fast, efficient and friendly service.

tial, born between 1 January 1964 and 31 December 1973, should waste no time in entering the seventh Enrico Caruso International Singing Competition, to be held this October in Milan's Verdi Conservatoire. First prize is L.5,000,000 and ap-

plications should be made by 31 August. Further details from Associazione Museo Enrico Caruso, Centro Studi Carusiani, Via Omboni 1, 20129 Milano, Italy tel: 010 392 295 18564.

### Obituaries

**We pay tribute** to the memory of the following:

- ☐ Dr RH Clifford-Smith. Member of professorial staff 1948-77. Died 23 July 1991
- ☐ Max Rostal CBE Hon RAM. Died 6 August 1991
- ☐ Philip Knowles ARAM. Student 1967-72. Died 11 August 1991
- ☐ Gwendolen Ransley ARAM. Died 5 September 1991
- ☐ Zino Francescatti HonRAM. Died September 1991
- ☐ Sir Andrzej Panufnik HonRAM. Died 27 October 1991
- ☐ Christopher Steel ARAM. Died January 1992
- ☐ Michael Bush ARAM. Died January 1992
- ☐ William Schuman HonRAM. Died February 1992



*A proud moment for Mrs Tanya Cardew, daughter of Sir Henry Wood, at the official opening of the Academy's Sir Henry Wood Room, recently restored to its full Edwardian splendour. Photo by Rita Castle.*

## The Reluctant Savoyard

*Elliptical billiard balls, potions and spells and modern major-generals kept Sir Arthur Sullivan busy for most of his career but, as Tony Miall discovers, the man who composed The Mikado felt that his best music was neglected.*

**Wednesday 13 May 1992** sees the 150th anniversary of the birth of Sir Arthur Sullivan – leading Victorian composer and co-begetter of those most English of all entertainments, the Savoy Operas. The manuscript of one, *The Mikado*, lies in the Library of the Academy, Sullivan's *alma mater*.

On 1st April 1884, just six weeks before his 42nd birthday, the recently knighted Arthur Sullivan wrote to his collaborator, W S Gilbert:

*'I will be quite frank. With Princess Ida I have come to the end of my tether – the end of my capability in that class of piece. My tunes are in danger of becoming mere repetitions of my former pieces, my concerted movements are getting to possess a strong family likeness and I have rung all the changes possible in the way of variety of rhythm....'*

The most celebrated and successful of all theatrical partnerships – that of W S Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan – was far from successful off-stage. In their copious and often acrimonious correspondence over many years the two men aired their differences about plots and construction. Sullivan, in particular, frequently expressed his concern over what he saw as the subordination of the music to the words. He also betrayed a deep anxiety over the lack of 'seriousness' inherent in the operetta genre.

In 1885, however, the collaboration still had some time to run. Sullivan's 'tether' turned out to be longer than he suspected or admitted. Barely a year after that letter, on 14th March 1885, *The Mikado*, the tenth and possibly greatest of all the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, opened at the Savoy Theatre and ran for 670 nights – almost equalling the record-breaking 700-performance run of *HMS Pinafore*.

What made Sullivan change his mind? The short answer was the prospect of continuing fame and fortune. Arthur Sullivan was born in Lambeth in South London in relative poverty. Taught music by his father, he obtained a place in the Chapel Royal at the age of twelve. Two years later he was the winner of the first Mendelssohn Scholarship which took him to the Royal Academy of

Music and then to Leipzig. He was hailed as a young genius – a consummate conductor and composer of sacred music, songs and symphonies. A champion of English music and musicians, he enjoyed a considerable reputation both at home and abroad. He was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1883 and became a familiar figure in royal and aristocratic circles. Despite his success Sullivan's celebrity became more and more firmly grounded on those 'light' works which he composed to live rather than on the more 'serious' sacred music which he lived to compose.

When Gilbert presented him with the libretto of *The Mikado* towards the end of 1884, he saw an opera whose plot and flavour were utterly in tune with the 1880s and the contemporary awakening of interest in

all things Japanese. Japanese design had been adopted by the highly fashionable aesthetic movement as one of the corner stones of its creed and Art Nouveau owed much to the exotic import. Adding further fuel to the fire, a Japanese Village Exhibition had opened in Knightsbridge early in 1885 to which the public flocked. An opera with a Japanese theme was assured of success and was bound to bring the substantial financial rewards which both men needed.

No amount of mere money, though, could silence Sullivan's scruples, fired as they were by his deep-rooted need to write 'seriously'. Four months after the opening of *The Mikado* he was in San Francisco putting the *San Francisco Chronicle* right about his music:

*'My sacred music is that on which I base my reputation as a composer. These works are the offspring of my liveliest fancy, the children of my greatest strength, the products of my most earnest thought and most incessant toil.'*

In the interview Sullivan also makes clear his feelings about the Savoy Operas and what he brought to them:

*'If [such works] are entitled to any claim as compositions, I rely entirely on the underlying vein of seriousness which runs through all my operas. In the composition of the scores I adhered to the principles of art which I had learned in the production of more solid works, and no musician who analyses the score of those light operas will fail to find the evidence of seriousness and solidity pointed out.'*

'Solid' and 'serious' are two words which keep on cropping up in Sullivan's writing. There can be no doubt that they were a reflex device wheeled out against a frequently imagined criticism of levity.

Towards the end of his life Sullivan was talking to the young composer, Ethel Smyth. He had just presented her with a full score of his oratorio, *The Golden Legend*, with the remark: 'I think this is the best thing I've done, don't you?'. Ethel Smyth in her autobiography remembers: 'When truth compelled me to say that I think *The Mikado* is his masterpiece, he cried out "O, you wretch!" But though he laughed I could see he was disappointed.'

Also in his declining years, writing of his most famous song, Sullivan said: 'I have composed much music since then (1877) but never have written a second "Lost Chord"'. Even if he had, it is doubtful whether it would have tipped the balance. The process that began during his lifetime continued with increasing momentum after his death and cheated him of his most cherished ambition – to be remembered primarily as a leading composer of sacred music.

The public paid the piper and finally called the tune. While even his most popular sacred song and most of his sacred music are only dimly remembered today, the score of *The Mikado* remains one of the Academy's most valuable assets.



*Sir Arthur Sullivan – serious and solid.*





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## Empire Builders

*Encouraged by Bernstein, fêted by the critics and held in awe by other players, Empire Brass is the quintet to reckon with. Christopher Huning talks bores, shanks and crooks with the meanest brass group Stateside of Grimethorpe.*

Leonard Bernstein and the Tanglewood Summer Festival have a lot to answer for to the brass world. Twenty years ago, various young American brass players happened to be performing at Tanglewood, where Bernstein thought they would sound rather good playing together as an ensemble.

They still sound rather good playing together. An American critic was moved to write, "Other ensembles, such as the Canadian Brass, may have an edge in matters of musical humour and general stage buffoonery. But the Empire Brass has precious few competitors when it comes to first-class performances of first-class repertoire." There is certainly no doubt about this, although I am inclined to think that even "precious few" is doing Empire Brass a slight injustice.

A quite remarkable feature of Empire Brass is the extraordinary diversity of the group's repertoire. It extends from the Renaissance and Baroque to the contemporary avant-garde, taking in some fairly extreme digressions along the way. Throughout all of this, they manage to combine a distinctive sound that is unfailing, whatever they are playing, with an ability to change stylistic caps with ease. Sam Pilafian, tuba player and co-founder, says of this, "it's our signature sound, which we've had since the beginning", and it would seem to be what prompted Bernstein and Michael Tilson Thomas to nudge them together in the first place. "We play five instruments, but we blend them into a single sonority. It's a big, full sound, probably because we have all had orchestral training."

So much for their sound. The obvious relish with which the group confronts almost any kind of music is their other distinguishing trademark. This has resulted in recordings of Gabrieli, Monteverdi, their own arrangements of 19th- and 20th-century orchestral pieces, a spectacular collection of music for brass, organ and percussion, and a disc of music by Gershwin, Bernstein and Tilson Thomas. This last is obviously close to their hearts: Tilson Thomas and Bernstein, quite apart from shouldering the blame for bringing them together, were mentors to the group since its inception. In the effusive words of Sam Pilafian, "we owe a lot to Lennie".

Part of the reason for the catholic approach of Empire Brass to repertoire seems to be conditioned by time and place. Pilafian says that before their

genesis in the early 1970s, brass players were not encouraged to explore different directions, and that theirs was the first generation to have this as a possibility. Perhaps this is being over-modest. There are notable examples, although few, that this notion had crossed minds prior to the 70s.

Even though the existence of cross-over artists has become an accepted part of musical life, the noticeably small number of musicians over the past 20 years who have not just embraced the idea but who have done so successfully serves to highlight the quite remarkable talents of Empire Brass. The group's latest recording, "Braggin' in Brass", a full-blown jazz disc, stands in sharp contrast to the many excruciating attempts at cross-over currently on the market, in which a 'jazz idiom' has been roughly



*Polished brass: (from left to right) Scott A. Hartman, trombone; Jeffrey Curnow, trumpet; Sam Pilafian, tuba; Rolf Smedvig, trumpet; Eric Ruske, horn.*

imitated by classically-trained players. "We studied jazz, Broadway show music, everything, and now we have all these musical languages we can speak."

Such ease and confidence is characteristic of the quintet's whole act. On stage, in spite of any deficiencies in "musical humour" and "general buffoonery", they manage to steer clear of rigid





formality, their publicity shots bearing comparison with those of the Kronos Quartet. Empire Brass are unusual performers in that they seem to be

perpetually mobile. They play standing up, shifting positions for different pieces, the more so towards the end of a 'gig' when they are, so to speak, loosening their collars and ties. Sam Pilafian explains that this is because they sound better and function better as a group this way. It even, apparently, makes them more confident about what they are playing. One might suspect that at the end of a two-hour-plus concert that holds no respite from their most virtuosic repertoire, that they would have the decency to be sagging at the knees, drenched in sweat, bursting blood vessels. Not a bit of it – their playing sounds as if they have only just arrived on stage.

In between a performing schedule that involves around 100 concerts a year, regular tours of Europe and the Far East as well the USA, Empire Brass manages to fit in an awful lot else beside. The players all perform as soloists. Principal trumpet, Rolf Smedvig features on a recently issued disc with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, with another on its way, and Sam Pilafian has recorded an album of solo jazz tuba. Extensive teaching commitments, whether holding masterclasses at the RAM, Tanglewood or elsewhere, or with the music faculty of Boston University, keeps them in touch with the next generation of players.

Fitness fanatics to a man, it is rumoured that Empire Brass force their students to go running every morning, not exactly the traditional brass player's way of doing things. But then, Empire Brass are by no means typical.

## Cinderella in the Organ Loft

Malcolm Rudland asks "Why specialize?" and explains how he sets about earning an honest crust.

All alumni freelancers must surely remember their moment of revelation, of the way they entered into the real jungle-world of earning money from making music. Mine came when I was crouched behind the double-bass in the pit of Her Majesty's Theatre, Haymarket, watching Gareth Davies conduct *Fiddler on the Roof* from memory. Would I take over conducting eight months of its tour, starting in Liverpool a week on Monday? No rehearsal, no full-score, "just come and watch me!" First-study organ and B.Mus didn't help, yet that was Gareth Davies's own background. In deep-end politics, it was a yardstick for survival, and a meal-ticket, often backfiring me into legitimate music. Last summer a couple couldn't get their church organist to learn Handel's *Arrival of the Queen of Sheba* and Widor's *Toccata* for their wedding, so they rang the Musicians' Union, who mistook the species. The recommended musician rang the couple to ask what line-up they wanted for the reception, only to find a band wasn't wanted, and he didn't know the Widor. He did, however, know me!

Once, though, my FRCO nearly lost me a free trip to China. I was supplying a Yamaha organ to travel trade show, and noticed the Chinese inviting agent's visiting cards for a raffle. I left my organ pipe logo, which in 1981 had won a prize in the British Letterheads Award. "And now ... the third prize ... an etching of the Great Wall of China ... Mr Fruco." Working in light music has also subsidised Cinderella-ish organ fees, funded my secretariat of the Peter Warlock Society, and a term on the London Opera Centre's *repetiteurs* course. Six voyages to the Falkland Islands also funded much time for practice.

Paul Patterson once wrote an organ piece for me, and when I was recently made musical director for a real *Cinderella* near his home town, I returned the compliment with a motif of his to start the pantomime overture. The show earned me in a month what most church posts offer for a year.

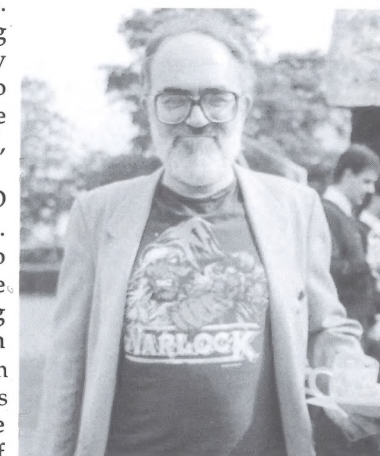
*Cinderella* head-hunted me only a month before rehearsals, but an audition phone-call from the Wexford Festival in 1978 referred to my letter of eight years earlier. My faith in careful filing also failed that year. I wrote to orchestras about organ parts. A letter from a Scottish orchestra said how kind of me to write, they had their own regular organist but would certainly keep my name in mind! Five months later a Shell/LSO tour with André Previn and Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, innocently found me back-stage at the Festival Hall one LSO night to meet the orchestral manager. "Sorry, we've booked one, but leave your card." Next day he was phoned by that Scottish orchestra, in a desperate panic for an organist and

organ for four *Zarathustras* the following week. The bush telegraph out-beat the secretariat. My Yamaha contacts, teaching merchant seamen on a refrigerated cargo vessel around Africa, again backfired me into 'legit' music, enabling me to hire and drive an 18cwt. van and electronic D85, to blast the hell out of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow, all to Gary Bertini's satisfaction.

An orchestral porter on that occasion was Bulgarian, and he greatly cushioned my initiation into Socialism. I had discovered my Hungarian ancestry, and campaigned to play in the East for 10 years, before Bulgaria and the USSR opened arms, offering champagne and a recital fee equivalent to a month's local salary. Arriving at Irkutsk at 5am, after a five-hour flight from Novosibirsk, I was soon rehearsing Tony Hewitt-Jones's *Sonata (Missa brevis)* in the House of Organ Music. A recording crew arrived with equipment, and I eagerly awaited my official interpreter (whose last client had been Elton John). Natasha asked if I could recreate appropriate sounds to accompany a film about Siberian salt mines – only for about a minute. My desire to finish rehearsing for that evening's recital on an exciting mechanical organ made it easier to comply than the thought of negotiating a union rate.

An even more devious contract produced a better rate at a more legitimate film session. In 1968, I was on Arthur Jacobs's music criticism course. Twenty years later the *Musical Times* asked me to write for them. One day, the magazine's editor was offered, but handed on to me, the organ part in a dummy orchestral session at the Royal Albert Hall. It was a Canadian-backed film, *Map of the*

*Human Heart*, set in the 1940s and with music by Gabriel Yared. After a copula in the cupola, a lady's stocking floats gently onto a brand-new set of 1990 timpani, yet the orchestra are all authentically kitted out by the frocks department in period tails, stiff-starched shirts and 'Come to Jesus' collars. Slip-on shoes were out, so I was at the organ in lace-ups two sizes too big. The film crew couldn't get the actress's stocking off and onto the timpani without six hours' overtime. The dummy session meant that the producer hadn't heard the music. Dots for 18 bars for a 22-strong string band arrived *misterioso*, but no organ part? Oh, yes, the composer said the organist's right hand plays the violins (mostly in octaves and on ledger lines), his left hand the violas, and his feet the cellos and double-basses. In one day, keyboard harmony with Brian Brockless had earned me more money than my student grant for one term. Now the *RAM Magazine* asks me to write 1,000 words in a light-anecdotal style for ....



Malcolm Rudland at a BBC recording of Warlock's *The Cricketers of Hambledon*, recreating the 1929 New Year's Day cricket match on Broadhalfpenny Down, Hambledon.

Photo: Brian Collins

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I expect you have often been profoundly moved by the dedication and skill of British musicians. But have you considered what happens to them when their playing days are over?

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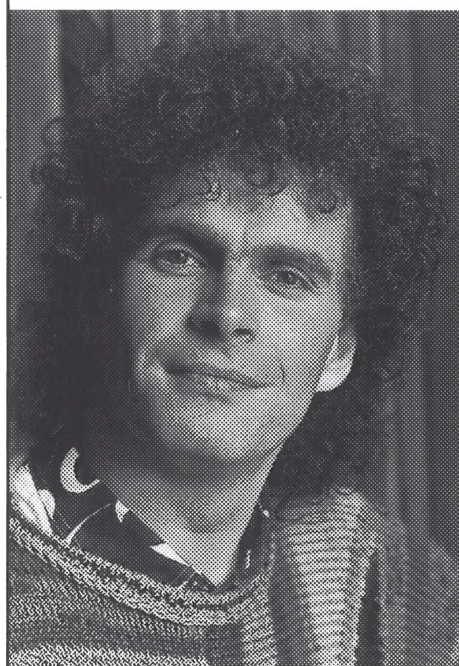
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## Scraping a Living

*Move along please! Next time you travel by Tube spare a thought for the chap playing 'The whiter shade of pale' on comb and paper. He just might be Academy trained. Alwynne Pritchard reveals the secrets of the busker's trade.*

An unlikely occupation, but quite a lucrative one. My first half-hour or so 'at work' is spent scratching at my cold and ill-humoured violin until a more acceptable sound is born of a slightly more relaxed bowing arm, amid increasing indifference to the passing throng. Mind you, being pushed about by a thousand scrambling businessmen cannot be compared with the embarrassment of playing to an empty underground station. On such occasions my squeaky little sound bounces about all over the place, exposing itself in a most vulgar manner.

I'm no great violinist, and always grateful for a little background noise and the short attention span of the late-running commuter. The innocent compliments of the tone-deaf – sometimes self-righteous in their appreciation of the classics' – can be a toe-curling experience.

My stage is the prestigious and much sought-after Jubilee to Piccadilly line tunnel at Green Park underground. The time is, most probably, about 9.30 am. The most difficult thing is actually getting a pitch. This is an exercise in nifty footwork involving much lurking in shadows for potentially dangerous uniforms to pass. Police are the buskers' worst nightmare, but station staff can be a pain in the neck, too.

I now have a fine repertoire of facial expressions, suitable as an accompaniment to each and every working hour and useful when dealing with an 'iffy' tramp or a particularly conscientious Bobby. One moment I'm all 'get out of my personal space' body language, and the next I'm almost prostrate on the floor with innocent and sugary good humour. I love it!

Booking a pitch is something buskers feel the need to do – it's conditioning, I think. The apparent rebellion of dragging your dad's grand piano on to the track at Bond Street and demanding money for your rendition of 'I'm an anarchist' is complimented by an endearing need to maintain law and order in this underworld. Hence the timetables drawn up by ageing hippies specifying exactly when it will be their go to sing 'The Streets of London' again.

Each busker is allotted a one-hour slot which is recorded on some stray bit of paper, curled up into a little sausage and ingeniously hidden behind the 'No Busking – Penalty £200' sign. The theory is that

each and every honest musician will resist the temptation to destroy this evidence by eating the bit of paper, or ignore it altogether. And even if we do behave, there are always policemen and the like ready to chuck a spanner in the works. They can disrupt the whole system by moving someone on half an hour early, or inviting them down to the station. Nevertheless, the timetable ritual seems to have survived, giving the busking scene a pleasant club-like atmosphere.

At the end of a day's work (I normally last about two hours) there's that trip to the bank. It's sort of the icing on the cake – the most embarrassing moment of many. Flopping thirty quid's worth of change in front of the same cashier as yesterday never fails to raise eyebrows. All very

character building, though! And being handed those ten-pound notes in exchange takes all the pain away. Now, I think to myself, I can afford that massage I need so badly – or perhaps I'll go for the haircut. Forget buying food for tomorrow – Selfridges here I come!



*It's a fair cop. Alwynne Pritchard caught in the act at the Imperial War Museum – not busking exactly, but scraping all the same.*

## How Green was my Valkyrie?

*Scottish Opera's controversial Wagner on stilts is still the talk of Sauchiehall Street. Hilary Summers comes back down to earth and makes a plea for circus training to become a regular feature of the Academy's singing curriculum.*

The nervous anticipation which heralds the first day in a new job must surely be the same in every profession. Driving through the majestic scenery along the M6 which would take me on to Glasgow, I felt daunted and yet exhilarated at the prospect of strutting around a theatre clad in a breastplate and horned helmet. For I was to be Schwertleite (ninth Valkyrie on the left) for the new Richard Jones production of *Die Walküre* for Scottish Opera.

On meeting the rest of the cast and production team, my anxiety abated somewhat, as everyone seemed jolly nice. It was only when I was introduced to my stilts that I realised it was going to be a bumpy ride.... Large, robotic-looking, aluminium contraptions, these extensions were to be strapped to the upper leg and foot and equipped with a rubber sole and numerous springs. The intention of raising us all to a uniform height of 7'3" meant that for the first time in my life I, a strapping six-footer, was on eye-level with all of my colleagues on stage, an experience which I found surprisingly disconcerting. It did, however, provide me with a bonus of being up a mere foot, whilst others struggled from a perch of at least two feet higher than their normal stature.

The solidarity of the lone stilt-walkers became legendary throughout the halls of Elmbank Crescent. One specific Riot of the Valkyries involved a mass unstrapping whilst Wotan's babies insisted upon heavy insurance cover, lest we trip over a straying Norn and tumble to our doom. This was speedily arranged and, like some inverted Snow White tale, it was "Ho-jo-to-ho! Back to work we go".

Seven weeks of strenuous rehearsal drew forth an impressive agility and a tightly choreographed routine involving semaphore signals, chuckling hands and hideous grimacing. Alas, the horned helmet of my vision transformed into a long purple skirt and a two-foot pointed hat which possessed no aural orifices and thus rendered us all deaf to even the loudest Wagnerian tuba. Adjustments were made and we set about getting used to the stage and the lights and perfecting those all important synchronised twitches.

The culmination of weeks of effort and preparation finally arrived and we were ready to be unleashed on the unsuspecting Glasgow audiences.

I was beside myself with excitement – positively manic, with rivers of adrenalin flooding my system. A few stern words from my elder and more experienced colleagues soon calmed me down, for after all a hyperactive Valkyrie is a potentially lethal one when the stilt factor is considered.

Standing on stage listening to the introductory bars of Act III I became aware that my knees had locked, my ear-holes were in the wrong place, and the biggest frog in the world had just hopped down my throat. Before I had time to discover more horrors, the curtain swished back, and we were on. The scene flew along and it seemed like only minutes and I was back



*Family fun: Willard White (Wotan) makes life uncomfortable for Jane Eaglen (Brünnhilde), watched over by a sorority of assorted Valkyries, in Richard Jones's Scottish Opera production of Die Walküre. Photo by Eric Thorburn.*

on my perch "de-stilting" and sweating happily into my leather glove.

Participating in a Wagner opera is an overwhelming experience and, in spite of my dislike of the stilts, I thought it was all fantastic. Critical response was also good, which helps to make one feel as if one has 'achieved'. I suppose I expected a professional company to be that much grander and more diva-oriented than the groups I had hitherto worked with. All I can say is that the people were terrific and just "got on with it", which is very heartening. Incidentally, if the RAM feels the need to include stilt walking as part of their opera course, I trust they will look no further for an expert tutor.



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*From the **Strand Musical Magazine**, 1893, comes this revealing portrait by **Sir Alexander Mackenzie** of student behaviour in the first year of the Academy's existence. Plus ça change....*

**T**he Academy student of 1823, then aged between ten and fifteen, having been accepted, after a terrible examination, by six noble Committee men and thirteen Professors, was handed over to the care of a worthy clergyman, or matron (according to sex), subjected to the most adamant form of discipline, allowed but six weeks' holiday per annum, and, if he failed to return on the appointed day, was summarily expelled. The same extreme punishment was inflicted for the smallest breach of the stern code of rules. The boys had to wear blue swallow-tail coats and caps, with the "Academy button", the girls highwaisted white frocks and "no curls". The latter seem to have been orderly, not to say meek, specimens of their sex, the only record of frivolity being the complaint of their looking out of the back windows (which were promptly ordered to be painted), and their receiving *billet doux* through the venal hall porter (who was summarily dismissed). But the boys revenged themselves for the discipline by many mad pranks. The worthy tutor was supposed to supervise their practice, but they quickly discovered that he was completely ignorant of music, and so used to play a choice assortment of Indian scales with the gravest earnestness, whenever he came round. Again, when he left the building, they would collect trombones and bassoons and perform a hideous charivari at the open front windows, and, when the members of the Oriental Club opposite sent over to complain, they would sit with folded hands till "the reverend" returned, and complain pathetically of the hardship it was to have their practice stopped. They bombarded the passers-by with candles which were served out to them impartially in equal quantities, summer and winter; they threw notes over the wall which divided their playground from that of the ladies, and once, driven to desperation by frequent "Fast Days", they rebelled against the food, tied their janitor in his chair, stormed the larder, and regaled themselves on the provisions found there, and with porter obtained from a neighbouring tavern. But dire punishment was meted out to those lawless spirits. With all this, they *worked*, in some respects, perhaps, under harder conditions than their modern successors; for, it must be remembered that they had to practise with pianos side by side, and back to back, and write their harmony exercises all



*No. 4 Tenterden Street, a few hundred yards to the east of Oxford Circus, formerly Lord Carnarvon's town house, and home to the Royal Academy of Music from 1823 until 1912. The first intake of pupils rebelled against the Academy's strict code of discipline, taking aim at passers-by with candles and serenading the residents of Hanover Square with the choicest Indian scales, "such as would dismay the student of today".*

together in the same room, a veritable pandemonium, such as would dismay the student of today.



# David of the right Rock

*Making it as a rock musician is no mean feat, but then to gain the respect of 'serious' musicians is almost unheard of. David Palmer tells Kate Sheriff why he thinks the classical world could benefit from loosening up.*

**T**his Autumn the Royal Academy of Music will be resounding to the sounds of sleek synthesizers and Be-Bop rappers as it launches its first ever Commercial Music Course. Predictably enough, the prospect has already caused a rumpus in both the 'Rock' and 'Classical' camps of the music business. David Palmer, experienced media-music composer, eccentric conductor and one-time Jethro Tull member, has been one of several RAM alumni involved in discussing various ideas with the Academy since the course was first mooted.

Palmer, well-known in his field for breaking down the barriers between raw rockers and coat-tailed conductors, welcomes the Academy's recognition that there's music beyond Beethoven's Ninth or even Stockhausen, but, he warns, "The course can't be a passport to Rock 'n' Roll stardom". All it can really try to offer, he feels, is inspiration to those already determined to succeed in the uncompromising media-music world. Life on the road as a journeyman music writer was no easy ride for Palmer - "and it never will be".

His own introduction to the musical world came relatively late - as an intelligent but disruptive 15-year old yobbo (his word), disillusioned with life in the industrial Midlands, his initial contact with the clarinet was, he says, just like a first love affair. "When I played the open note, it was like my first kiss - it responded to me as I breathed into it."



On entering the Academy in 1961, Palmer admits that he was stunningly ignorant of matters scholarly. Asked in an early harmony and counterpoint lesson to play some chords in the style of a Bach chorale, he delivered a swinging 6/8 *Barcarolle*. On the practical side, however, there were no problems. Inside the

Academy, Palmer's wizard clarinet playing and natural extemporizing talents gave him plenty of kudos; outside, in London clubs and pubs, they earned him the needed extra cash and gave valuable performing experience.

Even in the hedonistic days of the Sixties, jazz sessions in RAM rehearsal rooms were, Palmer says, "taboo". Yet he never felt discouraged. Approval always came wholeheartedly from his composition tutor, the multi-talented Richard Rodney Bennett, who, more importantly, stimulated Palmer's desire to compose. "I knew I could write music", he says, "but I thought every bar had to be a pearl. Richard was the person who lifted the scales from my eyes. He told me just to sit down and write. Music is written like a landscape, it's a picture, it's a whole lot of bits of detail, some interesting, some perfunctory."

It was sound advice for someone who was very shortly going to earn a hectic living writing music round the clock, in the back of taxi cabs, in aeroplanes or stark hotel rooms. It also resulted in Palmer walking out of the Academy in 1965 with the coveted Eric Coates Prize for Composition.

His winning score attracted the attention of prestigious British film-music writer Phil Green, who instantly hired Palmer as his ghost writer and orchestral arranger. Despite being mistaken for a librarian by the leader of Amsterdam's Concertgebouw Orchestra, he survived his "trial by fire" and gained invaluable hands-on experience under Green. Unlike most 'serious' composers Palmer was in the privileged position of having orchestral players at his disposal, giving almost immediate feedback on his work. But he had to produce the goods quickly: hopeful studio writers take note. "It's no good needing five weeks to do something that somebody else can do in five minutes. If you can't write fast, then don't be a studio writer, because that's the way studio music works. The music's still wet when the players get hold of it."

One of Palmer's worst deadline nightmares as a freelancer came hours before the live 'Kenneth Williams Show', when he was informed by the BBC's orchestrations manager, "There's a singer just getting on a plane in Italy now, to sing on the show tonight. We want you to orchestrate the song 'Granada' for a 40-piece band. The rehearsal starts when he arrives." Palmer ended up listening to the completed version just 10 minutes after his pen had finally lifted from his manuscript.

As an established freelancer in the late Sixties, Palmer's main problem was deciding what work to turn down. "One of the worst things", he admits, "was knowing what *not* to do. I spent far too much time chasing pound notes." One job he does not

regret taking on was arranging songs for the hopping-mad Ian Anderson and his underground Jethro Tull band. That collaboration culminated in Palmer becoming a full-playing member of the group. After 10 years of sell-out tours, chart hits and globetrotting, however, he left the band to pursue an independent career: his first step was to release a compilation album of Tull's greatest hits arranged for symphony orchestra. The cuts on this album, entitled *A Classic Case*, had Palmer's idiosyncratic touch but were often a far cry from the Tull originals - the edges were smoother, the sound was grander and the majority of those crucial lyrics were nowhere within earshot. "I had just finished working on a picture with the LSO for the first time. I orchestrated the Tull songs for symphony orchestra because I knew exactly how to make a symphony orchestra play rock music and make it sound good."

Palmer's diverse dabblings, juxtaposing classical sessions one day with Rock festivals the next, placed him in a unique position. He observed that there was a niche in the market into which his crossover creations might slip. *A Classic Case*, along with further symphonic rock arrangements of Genesis (*We know what we like*) and Pink Floyd (*Objects of Fantasy*), have, for him, all been worthwhile as far as satisfying the demands of record companies and bank managers. What about the actual music? This collection of albums, Palmer admits, is a curious thing. "They are conversational points ... essays in orchestral techniques. They are novel and show the material in many different lights. Sometimes they are a great improvement on the original cuts."

Improvements or not, Palmer soon discovered that this type of hybrid music only really worked if he was prepared to get stuck in himself, guiding orchestral players through an unaccustomed style. "Sometimes it is difficult to get a string section to perform in a way they think is actually the way they should be performing." It often takes more than a wave from the rostrum to achieve the sounds he desires. "When conducting, I'll get right in with them. They'll smile, but they'll do it. It makes everyone want to be part of what it is you understand." This is Palmer's message on the purely classical front, too. He is adamant that the conductor has the key to change the often stultifying way concert-hall music is perceived and received in this country. "What there's an absolute lack of is communication between the conductor and the orchestra on one side of the spotlight and the audience on the other. There is not

enough levity in the concert hall, that's for sure - and far too much in a Rock 'n' Roll band."

He is a strong believer in classical music being presented in a more relaxed format. "You should see them at the Hollywood Bowl ... Years and years ago, with Zubin Mehta conducting the LA Phil, they'd be whacking away at the *Scherzo* of the Beethoven Ninth and the people in their little pens would shout, 'Sock it to me, Zubin'. Perhaps one doesn't want it in the finest moments of some haunting Mozart slow movement, but there is no harm in people raising their arms and saying, 'Wow, wow'. We don't have that yet."

From his own recent experience conducting a programme of Elgar, Dvorák and Ravel with the

RPO at Charterhouse School in Surrey Palmer realised the importance of loosening-up the audience by talking to them in an amusing, informative manner. It is a device which can be used to break down ingrained communication barriers. "You don't do it on a nightly basis at the Festival Hall,



but if you lighten it all you start to make friends." Friends are well worth attracting, considering the empty rows of seats at so many orchestral concerts.

Palmer's charisma and natural adeptness at trading on all levels leaves him in the enviable position of being able to pick and choose whichever work he fancies. From the start, he has been obsessed with opening doors rather than closing them. The RAM has followed suit by opening its doors still wider with the creation of its Commercial Music Course. To succeed in its aims of training and preparing students for life as professional media musicians, however, the doors will have to be of the well-oiled, revolving variety. Palmer is convinced that the four-termly masterclasses will be the cornerstone. Session musicians of the moment and successful big-wigs like Michael Kamen, Michael Nyman, David Cullen and Chris Gunning - composers who actually generate their income from media music - should be persuaded to give students up-front first-hand experience of commercial reality.

Palmer has picked out the best qualities from each musical pigeon-hole and created a more accessible route to previously intimidating territories. His pink tail-coat may be out-dated but he continues to wear it. He dissolves into a wicked giggle. "That always goes down really well." Palmer is a wise old rocker, whose better judgement warms many hearts.



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## Notes from the Keyboard

*With the type of schedule that should help keep British Airways in profit for years to come, Roderick Elms could be excused for feeling jet-lagged. But it's all in a day's work. He offers a whistle-stop guide to life as a keyboard player.*

There was a long queue of weary musicians awaiting access to Tel-Aviv's Ben Gurion airport, very late all in an April evening. As I waited, I contemplated the inside of my passport. 'Classical pianist', it said. Why 'classical', I wondered? Why not organist, harpsichordist, celestist or simply 'keyboard player', as my breed is more affectionately known, conjuring up images of synthesizers and labyrinths of wire?

I could never have imagined my current life when I left the RAM in 1973 after serving six years, four almost statutory and an extra two tagged on for good conduct. I studied piano and organ (manoeuvring myself past an FRCO firing squad in the process), and took part in a variety of experiments, including public sightsinging in alto and tenor clefs under the guise of aural training. I also had a stab at conducting, with one year spent alongside a 17-year-old Simon Rattle.

Curiously, it was only a couple of years after leaving the RAM that I re-appeared in the Duke's Hall with the BBC Symphony Orchestra on one of my first professional engagements. During the performance I was to strike the inside of the Academy's treasured Steinway with bass-drum sticks, in full view of the Principal and other honoured guests, a practice which, paradoxically, would have been unthinkable as a student but was satisfyingly legal now. The technique, incidentally, is frequently called for in film-music sessions but, to my knowledge, is still not taught in music colleges.

Reminiscences of some high, and not so high, moments during a six-month period last year may help to explain some of the peculiar activities of the itinerant 'keyboard player'.

January begins with the first two of several performances of *Carmina Burana* (LSO/Hickox) – a good start to the year for keyboard players as it uses three of them. Record recital for Radio Two and begin work learning piano parts and solos for Radio Three recital with trumpeter Martin Hurrell in March. Interruption to negotiate three performances of Mahler's Symphony No. 8 (LPO/Tennstedt), even better value than *Carmina Burana*, with four keyboard players. Have now played three of the keyboard parts: hope to play fourth at some point. Also navigate my way through accompanying audition sessions for various London orchestras and a mysterious group from Spain, apparently conducting world tour in search of players.

February starts ominously with double-bass auditions. Piano parts frequently in illegible manuscript or wrong key – discover why we learned to transpose at RAM. Arrive an hour late at Abbey Road studios, due to sudden and unexpected

appearance of snow, for overdubbing of missing part on recording (another story). Next day's recital at Southend is postponed thanks to snow. First of year's visits to Birmingham (LSO). Concert terrific: hardest part is getting Macdonald's milk-shake through straw during break. Barbican car-park locked on coach's delayed return; half-hour wait for it to be opened.

Last-minute pleas from production company to add two bars to TV commercial; takes four months to get paid. Starting to get concerned about available



*If it's January it must be Carmina Burana. Rod Elms enjoys a rare moment of relaxation in front of the camera lens.*

practice time for Radio Three recital – perhaps should not have spent free day in France stocking up on



wine.

Receive answerphone message from Rostropovich to ring him in Washington; eventually found him in Paris. We are to do a recital together in April but some music not available. Spend much time searching music shops.

Month ends with Britten's *War Requiem* on much extended Barbican platform to accommodate LSO/LSC/Richard Hickox. I'm allowed to remain in bar (NB for sole purpose of playing off-stage chamber organ) with choirboys of St Paul's Cathedral, John Scott conducting. Spend much of performance persuading good ladies behind bar not to shuffle bottles whilst doors to hall are open. Check at next day's recording that no-one has thoughtfully reset combination pistons on organ.

**S**outhend recital re-arranged for 1 March. Asked to play apparently unpublished Chopin Waltz for TV commercial. Eventually dictated over phone from an old recording (thanks to RAM aural training). Meet Bramwell Tovey for Italian meal; catch up on past year's news. Next day make second visit to Birmingham for live Pebble Mill recital. They seem happy and smoked salmon is excellent; celebration curry at home in evening.

Next week, play piano rehearsal for super soprano and extremely rude Italian conductor, whose main aim seems to be to reduce her to tears. Play solo on 'Friday Night is Music Night' on Radio Two live from Golders Green Hipperdrome and organ in the chamber version of Rutter's *Requiem* on Palm Sunday (Romford Parish Church/Jonathan Venner). Check that soprano soloist has not removed rear-view mirror from organ for purposes of adjusting make-up.

**B**egin term in April on harpsichord (LPO/Masur) with performance and recording of music by Schnittke, including piece for amplified solo cello and apparently obligatory solo for back-desk second violinist - poor chap. Muse on what conductor means by "more piano"; play louder (momentary seizure for pianist when he's tacet) or the whole orchestra to be quieter? Then to organ for Chandos recording of Elgar's *The Music Makers* (LPO/Thomson). Remember there's some practice to do on Mozart concerto movement for recording with LSO later that week - mild panic.

Monday 15, playing for auditions at BBC Maida Vale and suddenly messages arrive in all directions from Rostropovich's agent: where is he? Our recital is that afternoon and he's not been seen since Buenos Aires the day before. Turns up at 3.00pm and, after brief half-hour rehearsal, we drive to Lancaster House to be greeted by an assembly of heads of state and government. Perform Britten, Shostakovich and -thank you Division 5 Harmony - Tchaikovsky from full score (apparently piano part is like gold dust in western hemisphere) Two days later I'm in Israel studying passport and preparing for three concerts on piano (LSO/Tilson Thomas).

One free day to explore, but that's a Saturday and most of Israel is shut. Find time to float in Dead Sea, but regret forgetting sun-tan cream. Back on plane

two days later for whistle-stop tour of Spain (RPO/Ashkenazy). Spend every available free moment learning Saint-Saens' 'Wedding Cake' Caprice on celeste (only available instrument) for May concert.

Four nights, four cities, three internal flights and two suicidal pilots later, I'm home heading straight for Royal Opera House to play for viola audition and wondering why I ever spent all that money on sun-tan cream as it rained most of the time - nearly got drowned in the Strand.

**M**ay. Third visit to Birmingham to play Saint-Saens' solo in first broadcast concert from new Symphony Hall (coffee 90p per cup - be warned). Night before is spent having excellent meal with producer Alan Boyd and Stuart Burrows. Waitress is clearly confused as to Stuart's role and enquires as to which pub he sings in.

Later in month I'm to meet up with Bram Tovey again for 'Friday Night' in Brighton. The first half over-runs, so I'm asked if I can cut my four-minute solo by a minute. Do even better and lose two - thanks again to Div. 5 for getting me fairly neatly from E flat

to D flat. However, despite occasional cuts like this, it remains one of life's mysteries that the BBC can produce a full two-hour live concert and finish within 30 seconds of the scheduled time.

At the end of May I visit Norwich with RPO to play synth in new work. Rehearsal time runs out before reaching end of piece and, after performance, I'm left wondering whether the loud coughing noise from the synth over the pianissimo ending was really intended. Discover there was a

misprint for the designated sound.

Many concerts are performed with just one rehearsal, usually attempting to cover a vast repertoire. Often pass time wondering who decides on the frequently inaudible cues written in the midst of pages of rests or the cue which appears several times before you play. The main theme of *An American in Paris* is a classic, being the only cue in the celeste part prior to its entry and occurring a great many times. Equally interesting are orchestral rehearsals of choral pieces where the only written cues are vocal.

**J**une sees a performance of Strauss's *Alpine Symphony*, a rare event due to need for 16 off-stage brass and much wind, both for brass and storm effects. Because of change in rehearsal schedule, spend interesting evening rehearsing Dutilleux's *Symphony No.2* (RPO/Previn) when expected at Rostropovich's apartment for piano rehearsal of Honegger's Cello Concerto. End of month spent on harpsichord recording other Schnittke Cello Concerto (LSO/Rostropovich/Ozawa) and looking forward to adjudicating for Essex Young Musician of the Year competition organised by Ongar Music Club.

Well, six months are up and you may well be more confused than when I started. For now I have to go and play for some violin auditions, or was it violas? I was once told how to tell the difference, but that's another story.

*"I often pass time wondering who decides on the frequently inaudible cues written in the midst of pages of rests or the cue which appears several times before you play."*

# The Best Seats in the House

## New Seats in the Refurbished Duke's Hall.

**T**he Academy would publicly like to thank all those who purchased a seat on the floor of the new Duke's Hall. These seats have been designed by Addison Nelson Design Consultants and are being manufactured by Luke Hughes & Co Ltd (whose founder, as it happens, studied cello in the Junior Academy). The 'Duke' Chair will be made in oak, with contrasting upholstery, and is capable of being linked and stacked while at the same time being easy to store and handle. It will be comfortable as well as durable. All donors are entitled, if they wish, to a brief inscription on the seat, or seats, they have purchased. The names of the donors below are not necessarily their professional names nor, in the case of former students, their names while they were at the Academy.

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# Attend the Tale of Sweeney Todd at Her Majesty's Pleasure

*From Coutts Bank to Wormwood Scrubs Prison, Pimlico Opera could never be called predictable. Lynton Black sums up the case for bringing opera to West London's least desirable residence.*

"**P**imlico Opera, conducted by Wasfi Kani, are putting on 10 performances of Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* and they would like you to play the part of the Judge. Oh, and by the way, five of the performances are in Wormwood Scrubs."

I little considered the implications nor consequences of accepting such an engagement; after all, one venue is pretty much like any other, particularly when it comes to backstage facilities – or are they? Backstage facilities were to be the least of my worries. Further enquiries lead to the grim realisation that not only were we to perform to inmates, but also that they would be taking part, providing the chorus, building the set and helping backstage.

Rehearsals were scheduled to start for the principals in October last year for opening later in the month, but in July I was expected to attend the chorus rehearsals in Wormwood Scrubs to allow the inmates to get know and trust me and, equally, me them. The first and subsequent visits for a law-abiding citizen like myself, whose only crime could be construed as brining 1.25 litres of gin through customs rather than 1 litre, came as a shock. Armed with personal identification, we checked in at the main gate to the unbelievably rude and surly men cocooned in their warm, bullet-proof room. An escort eventually arrived as we froze outdoors, and we were led through a heavy, metal door into a type of air lock. The door closed behind us and only then did a second door at the end of the room open. This door led out into an inner courtyard, a sort of no man's land surrounded by high wire fencing and masses of barbed wire. On through a small locked gate and instructed to move only as a group, we finally arrived at our destination – the chapel. This whole process was repeated every time we had a rehearsal.

The great Victorian chapel, like the rest of Wormwood Scrubs, built by inmates, was a strange a bizarre mixture. At one end, stands an altar, and, behind it, the reserved host complete with flickering candle; at the other, the makings of the Sweeney set and, in the nave, a fully laid-out Badminton court! Some fifteen minutes after arriving, we nervously introduced ourselves to members of prison staff and stage management. As if from nowhere, the inmates arrived accompanied by their warders (also ready to take to the boards). The first thing that struck me was the lack of distinction in clothing. All were wearing Jeans and shirts in washed-out blues, blacks and greys, the only distinguishing feature being the slender length of silver chain hanging from waist-belt to pocket. I could see in the eyes of some of the inmates a strangeness, a detachment, a guilefulness,

and in others, friendliness and warmth. Their first act was to light up their own rolled cigarettes (reserved host or not). It's at times like these I would dearly like to see how some of the more pretentious singers of this world, who complain about someone smoking within a five-mile radius of their precious throats, would cope with telling these boys to stub them out!

The director of *Sweeney Todd*, Francesca Joseph, introduced me to the assembled company as playing the Judge, which provoked low moans and a few hisses – they weren't meant as a joke! It took me by surprise and, whilst the other introductions took place, I made the conscious decision that whenever I was in character I would make that abundantly clear. The question of what is acting and what is real life, particularly with *Sweeney Todd* and its diverse emotional states, to me, was going to be a problem. In my mind there is a very clear line, but it worried me that emotionally some of these men might find that line blurred. I therefore decided that after coming off stage, after delivering blistering moralistic attacks on the "vermin of the world", I would either doff my wig and say "I thank you and good night", or even utter my favourite and well-worn line, "it's going awfully well". Perhaps for this reason or because my initial fears were unfounded, everything worked out fine, and the touching card after the show's first night, signed by the inmates, remains as testament to this.

In rehearsal, Francesca was acutely aware of the difficulties of working with an amateur group and especially these men with their own very special needs. Before every rehearsal, we had a warm-up session where, standing in a large circle, exercises were performed, ranging from simple bending and stretching to massage and rubbing (the 'conjugals' as the inmates christened it) through to complex memory routines and role playing. Warm-up over and down to the nitty-gritty. Just like any other rehearsal, we went through the music over and over again. Sondheim is by no means easy, with his complex rhythms, melodies and libretto, but quite soon we were without copies and onto the stage.

Eventually it was time to put the pieces together. It was then that we got to know the inmates a little better. I for one was not interested in their individual case histories. I thought, rightly or wrongly, that my relationship with them might be prejudiced if I knew too much of their background. Inevitably you heard that one person was extradited from his speed boat off the coast of Spain and that another had killed his mother, father, best friend or whatever, but I was more interested in the man who cleaned and looked after the chapel so well: a privilege, as he called it, with the perk of getting all the vegetables from the harvest festival, which he then boiled up in the tea

urn. Or the man who spent 30 hours a week learning his score for the show, eventually knowing how many beats between every single chorus entry.

The show quickly came together, although initial rehearsals were somewhat disjointed. The inmate's timetable is sacrosanct. Lock-up is at 8.00pm, show or no show; it came as no surprise when, in the middle of the dress rehearsals, half of the company disappeared. One particular rehearsal had to be a run, which meant the inmates would miss their supper. It would not be held back, so it was decided to have a picnic in the chapel, with each member of the cast providing food. It was then that we found out that fresh vegetables were in short supply and that fruit was scarce, perhaps because it was purloined and, with the addition to yeast, made into very rough booze! Rehearsals over and the first night loomed. The timetable for performance was complex. We arrived very early and had a warm-up, the inmates having their own separate warm-up. The orchestra arrived and then, with dog handlers and extra guards, the inmates were shepherded in before the audience and via a separate door. Curtain up. "Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd" – and attend they did, the press coverage being quite phenomenal.

Saturday, though, was to be a performance entirely for the other inmates of Wormwood Scrubs: at no other time in my career have I been so nervous. The start of the show was extraordinary, with great shouting, barracking, wolf-whistles and cheers, but the audience soon settled down to listen intently,

even though 80 per cent were smoking and we had to sing in a cloud of blue vapour. These listeners, bereft of the conventions of show or opera audiences, punctuated the silence with the occasional outburst. For example, after a poignant speech by Todd about "15 years sweating in a living hell ... 15 years", a voice was heard to shout out "Bollocks". Or when the Judge sang a song of lust after his ward another was heard to say, "the dirty old bugger". When the Judge was killed, another called out, "ere, cut 'im again".

At the end of the performance and before they were all marched back to their cells, we had the opportunity to meet our audience. I have performed to many audiences, including those rarefied black-tie, £850-per-ticket types who attend Pavilion Opera productions, but nowhere were the thanks more genuine than at Wormwood Scrubs. If, like I did, you hold the view that prison inmates are there for a reason and that they should not enjoy any sort of privilege, think on this. One of the inmates was specially persuaded by the caring staff at Wormwood Scrubs, because they knew that without a very special stimulus, something to bring him back to the outside world, suicide was predicted within the month. That same prisoner shook me by the hand and said he now has a purpose to his life.

Was it worth it?

*The history of the world, my pet ...*

*Oo, Mr Todd, Oo, Mr Todd. Leave it to me.*

*Is learn forgiveness and try to forget.*

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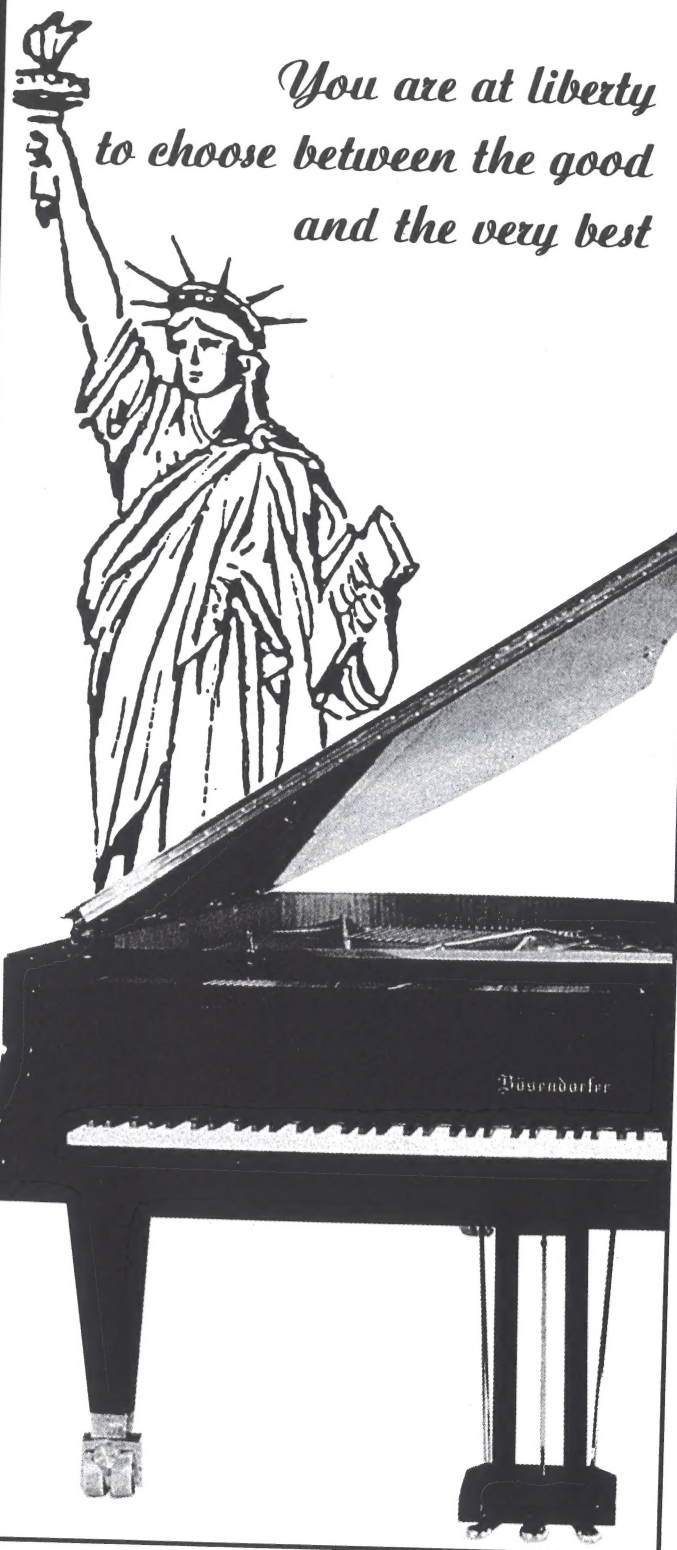
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## Producing the Goods

*There's more than one way to become a BBC producer. Jillian White reveals a few trade secrets and provides an insight into her own career development, from cleaning toilets in Vienna to producing Haydn's Piano Sonatas in Bristol.*

I'm often asked "How do you become a music producer?" My standard reply is "Many roads lead to Rome!" Mine, however, has been a fairly atypical highway.

I was born in 1942 into a talented working-class family in Market Harborough, where at 13 I passed the 13-Plus to enter grammar school education (Leicestershire was the first county to offer such a chance for 'late developers'). It was there that I began to take an interest in singing – albeit mostly flat – but I knew that it was important to me. Someone, I remember, told me that I'd got a 'contralto'! How quickly I rushed home to mother to ask if I should go to the doctor. A combination of singing in the school and parish church choirs gave me my first taste of the joys of singing, so when the church organist urged me to enter the County Music Competition in the 'Open Contralto Class', I decided to have a go. "Art thou troubled?" and "Where sweet Anne sings", I remember, were the set pieces. Olive Groves was the adjudicator and kindly gave me the first prize. I was 15. Eric Pinkett, the visionary music adviser who founded the Leicestershire School of Music – it was a singular body in those days – heard me and offered me a part in Gluck's *Drunkard reformed*. Two months later I was on a tour of Norway. My appetite was whetted.

Actually, it was 'Roobinstine' playing 'Shopan' who had first alerted me to my enchantment, nay, devotion to music. My parents had left me for an hour or two and I couldn't resist playing with the knobs on the round bakelite wire-less. Suddenly 'Roobinstine', so the announcer said, ensnared me. The muse struck as if with Cupid's dart, and I'm not ashamed to admit that I have never recovered, but I believe that my spelling of artists'

and composers' names has improved somewhat the while.

At 18 I became the first person ever from Market Harborough – or so I'll believe until I'm told otherwise – to enter the Royal Academy of Music. I studied singing at the RAM under Bruce Boyce, theory with Dorothy Howell and keyboard with various junior teachers. Having come late to music, my digits remained particularly recalcitrant and, in any case, what I really wanted to be was a singer. My student years were not at all distinguished – my contemporaries Amelia Freedman, Sheila Armstrong, Jill Gomez, Philip Langridge, Richard Angus, Dennis Simons, Howard Davies, Leon Downey, Rachel Gutsell, Michael Rippon, John Bingham, David Cullen,

Christopher Gradwell et al, all outshone and filled me with awe. Nevertheless, something inside me propelled me forward. Even at this stage, I was more inclined to 'give' someone else a date or offer a performer advice rather than set myself up as the soloist. Four years passed much too quickly and as I left, totally bewildered, I walked down the Academy's steps and along the Marylebone Road for the last time, wondering 'where next?'

Part-time work cataloguing music for the BBC kept body and soul together – the latter being by now tutored by Mary Jarred. At that time Mary's only other pupil had been Sibyl Michelow so, when Leo Wurmser introduced me to her, she rightly claimed that she'd had a 100 per cent success rate so far as a teacher. She took me on but sadly I was

to reduce her success rate to 50 per cent – I failed to meet her exacting standards. However, I know that the combination of Leo (he'd been assistant to Richard Strauss, Bruno Walter and Clemens Krauss),



*"Music can unite the world." Jillian White.*





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## Records Reviewed

*Andrew Stewart samples a random selection of recent releases from Dale to De Vitry, taking in Hiawatha and John Major along the way.*

### COLERIDGE TAYLOR

#### *Hiawatha*

Helen Field, Arthur Davies,  
Bryn Terfel

Chorus and Orchestra of the  
Welsh National Opera

Kenneth Alwyn, conductor  
Argo CD 430 3562 (2 CDs)

Everything about this immensely enjoyable recording suggests a labour of love, from the record company's faith in supporting the first complete recording of a work that was once among the most popular within the choral repertoire, through Kenneth Alwyn's fascinating and informed notes on the composer, to the performance itself. It would be hard to argue that Taylor achieves consistently memorable music, but there is no lack of commitment from soloists, orchestra and the admirable WNO Chorus alike. Arthur Davies's radiant account of 'Onaway! Awake, beloved!' positively leaps out of the speakers, straightforward and unaffected by extravagant sentiment. Likewise, Bryn Terfel is on terrific form, rich and warm of tone.

Given the extent of the choral writing in *Hiawatha* it's hardly surprising that the annual Royal Albert Hall performances of the work under Malcolm Sargent assumed almost cult status, attracting choral society members from all points of the Home Counties, complete with tepees, war-paint and battledress. Bold and brave as the choral writing undoubtedly is, there is a lack of genuine variety that begins to pall when listening to the three parts of the cantata at one sitting. Even so, Kenneth Alwyn's grasp of the score is such that moments of pure self-indulgence are avoided, the choral singing kept clean and direct. The Elgarian opening to the work's second part, 'The Song of Minihaha', and the subsequent chorus sees Alwyn at his passionate best.

### BENJAMIN DALE

Music for Viola and Piano  
Simon Rowland-Jones, viola  
Neil Immelman, piano  
Etcetera Records KTC1105

Benjamin Dale studied composition at the RAM with Frederick

Corder, who felt that his pupil wrote "fewer and better works than any English composer of his generation". Between 1937 and his death in 1943, Dale served as Warden of the Academy. Simon Rowland-Jones and Neil Immelman offer an excellent introduction to Dale's chamber music, particularly strong in the Phantasy for viola and piano. Rowland-Jones takes full advantage of Dale's virtuoso writing, originally intended for William Primrose, producing a rich, warm sound throughout. The Brahmsian Romance from the Suite for viola and piano is splendidly done, characterful and passionate but never brash.

Of the works for solo piano, *Pruella* was composed for Dale's fellow inmates at the Ruhleben concentration camp in Berlin, where he was interned during the First World War together with fellow composers Frederick Keel and Edgar Bainton. It contrasts strongly with the much darker Impromptu No.3, showing the range of Dale's inventiveness. Neil Immelman's reading of the Impromptu exploits its rhythmic fluidity, his subtle rubato highlighting the work's song-like qualities. A strong introduction to the music of an unfairly neglected composer.

### PURCELL

*O sing unto the Lord; O praise God in his holiness; Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; It is a good thing to give thanks; O give thanks unto the Lord; Let mine eyes run down with tears; My beloved spake.*

The Choir of New College,  
Oxford; The King's Consort/  
Robert King, director  
Hyperion CDA66585

The first volume in Robert King's complete Purcell anthems and services for Hyperion carries on in the finest traditions set in his series of the odes and welcome songs. King sets the well-known against the unfamiliar, showing the variety of Purcell's church music. The pitch chosen for this recording is that most probably in use in the Chapel Royal during Purcell's time, at A=466 a full tone higher than that employed today as 'standard' Baroque pitch, ef-

fectively transforming the sound of the music and making sense of Purcell's voice ranges.

New College Choir is on immaculate form, supplying the treble soloists in the verse anthems and singing in robust, unmannered fashion. At the higher pitch, the choir has an added degree of bite missing from so many recordings of this repertoire. Of the soloists, James Bowman and Michael George stand out, although the basis of these performances derives from the complete involvement shown by all concerned. Purcell's genius is everywhere apparent in these works, not just in chestnuts like *My beloved spake* but in the setting of Psalm 92, *It is a good thing to give thanks*. Highly recommended.

### PHILIPPE DE VITRY

#### Motets and Chansons

Sequentia/Benjamin Bagby,  
Barbara Thornton

Deutsche harmonia mundi RD77095

Despite his achievements as scholar, poet, philosopher, man of church and state, and musician little of the work of Philippe de Vitry survives. His musical treatise, *Ars nova*, written early in the 14th century, suggests that its writer was blessed with considerable intellectual powers, able to codify a new system of rhythmical notation that allowed greater flexibility in composition than that which it replaced. Only four works can be ascribed with any certainty to De Vitry, a further 12 added to the canon by circumstantial evidence. By their complexity and musical subtlety, it is clear that these works were intended for a learned audience, not unreasonable from a man who served as diplomatic adviser to three French kings and who became Bishop of Meaux. De Vitry's music provides a mirror on the medieval world that stands comparison with that of his near contemporary Machaut.

The virtuoso nature of De Vitry's 'new art' suits the overtly dramatic style of performance encouraged by Bagley and Thornton: for example, in *Heu Fortuna subdola* the performers relish in the natural conflicts between the simultaneous texts. Thornton's ability as a storyteller is central to the success of



*De Vitry's Lai "Talant j'ai"*, which, at almost 14 minutes' duration, could so easily lose its way. Using practical scholarly editions of both texts and music, Sequentia's approach to performance practice is eminently sensible throughout. A must for any serious medievalist and well worth a try for those who usually venture no earlier than William Byrd.

# **A L'Estampida Medieval Dance Music The Dufay Collective Continuum CCD 1042**

**M**ade a few months after a successful concert at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall, the Dufay Collective's debut disc gives a generous conspectus of European dance music from the 13th and 14th centuries. Less than 50 dances from before 1400 survive in notated form, the inference clearly being that improvisation played a large part in replenishing and expanding traditional melodies. Before hearing the Dufay Collective I had adopted a prejudice inspired by the group's rather pretentious sounding name, an unfair judgment as it happens and one which this disc sweeps aside in the most energetic and earthy of fashions.

The Dufay Collective reason that the influence of the Moslem world on the Italian dances in their programme would have been strong, and that by examining living Arabic and Mediterranean traditions of improvisation much can be transferred back to the performance of earlier repertoires. Similar techniques are used for the English and French works here, with percussion playing a significant role in adding the requisite eastern flavour. In live performance I found the highly repetitive Estampie from the Robertsbridge Codex, one of the earliest surviving examples of a keyboard work, somewhat monotonous: on disc and in more intimate surroundings its hypnotic character becomes much more apparent, a medieval equivalent of Ravel's *Bolero*. The paired Italian dances, slow-fast, accentuate this quality still further, the contrast between the static *Lamento di Tristano* and its adjoining *Rotta* coming as a complete surprise, the latter possessing an almost jazz-rock feel. This is no dull exercise in recreating the past for the past's sake: these dances will set feet tapping, arms moving and even hips swaying.

# **The Rose and the Ostrich Feather & The Crown of Thorns**

**Music from The Eton  
Choirbook vols 1 & 2  
The Sixteen/Harry Christophers**

**Collins 13142 (vol. 1);  
Collins 13162 (vol. 2)**

**M**y own interest in English vocal music from the early Tudor period was awakened first by seeing it on the printed page and marvelling at its rhythmic complexities, and then by hearing The Sixteen's Meridian recordings of works from The Eton Choirbook. Just the name of this great manuscript and the association of many of its featured composers with the Chapel Royal of Henry VII arouse antiquarian interest, but the sheer beauty of its music, richly sonorous and decorated, captivates from the very first bar.

As an introduction, taken from The Sixteen's latest venture to record the complete Eton Choirbook contents, two works stand out in terms of sheer opulence: William Cornysh's *Salve regina* [Vol.1, track 6] and John Browne's peerless *Stabat mater* [Vol. 2, track 5]. In the Cornysh work, Harry Christophers paces the individual sections of the work to highlight its ebb and flow, reserving the greatest climax for the final, fully-scored pages at the words "*O dulcis Maria, salve*". I have found some of The Sixteen's past recordings rather lacking in passion, safety seeming to be the order of the day; here, and in the second Eton Choirbook volume, the singing is both boldly expressive and strikingly accurate in matters of intonation and ensemble.

Volume 2 of this enterprising project concentrates on the three *Stabat mater* antiphons of Browne, Davy and Cornysh, all used for contemplative Passiontide devotion in Eton College chapel. Two religious part-songs from the near contemporary Fayrfax Manuscript are included to give a flavour of the type of music performed in the college hall on special occasions. Of these, Sherynham's haunting *Ah, gentle Jesu* [track 4] receives a strong and dramatic performance to suit the text's sorrowful dialogue. There are now a number of admirable recordings of Browne's *Stabat mater* in the catalogue, including The Sixteen's previous analogue version. In its wide range, both tonal and emotional, I feel Christopher's latest reading gets closest to the spiritual heart of the work.

**Songs to Shakespeare  
Anthony Rolfe Johnson, tenor;  
Graham Johnson, piano  
Hyperion CDA66480 (CD)**

**A**ny disc that reveals the hidden talents of a certain John Major has an immediate claim to the attention, but the 19th-century composer's treatment of 'If love makes me forsworn' from *Love's Labour's Lost* is only one of the delights of this excellent song recital. Graham Johnson's programme notes explain that almost

nothing is known Major, 'even the catalogue of Gooch and Thatcher treats him as no more than a marginal figure'. Major, Love's Labour's Lost, Thatcher ... this all seems too good to be true. The same might be said of the rest of this disc, but the terrific variety of music to Shakespeare texts grips the attention from beginning to end. Here, the singer breathes life into many a song that at face value would appear to have little going for it, William Linley's 'Lawn as white as driven snow' and Henry Bishop's 'O happy fair' particularly convincing examples.

Anthony Rolfe Johnson colours the texts without recourse to mannerism, at his best in Stanford's triumphant 'The rain it raineth every day', Quilter's 'It was a lover and his lass' and Howells' 'Under the greenwood tree'.

The final group of songs, composed by 'The new Elizabethans', disprove the adage that good verse can never be set to good music, Tippett's *Songs for Ariel* especially so. As ever, Graham Johnson's work adds immeasurably to the impact of all the songs on this disc, highlighting lines within the accompaniments but without getting in the way of the voice part. Splendid stuff.

**JANACEK  
The Cunning Little Vixen; Taras  
Bulba**

**Lillian Watson, Robert Tear,  
Thomas Allen, Diana  
Montague, Gwynne Howell;  
Orchestra and Chorus of the  
Royal Opera House, Covent  
Garden; The Philharmonia  
Simon Rattle, conductor  
EMI CDS 754212 2 (2 CDs)**

**J**anacek's flair for setting the Czech language and the way in which his melodic lines frequently follow the inflexions of the text can, to a certain degree, be undermined by the use of an English translation. Simon Rattle's new recording almost succeeds in giving the impression that *The Cunning Little Vixen* was conceived in English, his cast taking every opportunity to bring Rudolf Tešnohlídek's earthy tale to life. One can feel the warmth of the sun on the Moravian countryside as the first act Prelude lazily unfolds. Recorded following a run of the work at the Royal Opera House, this is in every way a polished performance but with no lack of theatrical spontaneity as a result. As the Vixen, Lillian Watson is entirely in sympathy with her character, alluring and yet vulnerable. Thomas Allen, Robert Tear and Gwynne Howell as the three not-so-wise men are outstanding throughout. Among the plethora of recent opera sets, this new *Vixen* takes some beating.

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